

History of Mahaska County (Chapter II, pt. 3)

W. A. Hunter

ISSN 0003-4827

Material in the public domain. No restrictions on use.

Recommended Citation

The Annals of Iowa, 7(3) (Jul. 1869): 259-265

Hosted by [Iowa Research Online](#)

common substitute for bread was hominy, a palatable and wholesome diet, made by boiling corn in weak lye till the hull or bran peels off, after which it was well washed to cleanse it of the lye, then boiled again to soften it, when it was ready for use as occasion required, by frying and seasoning it to suit the taste. Another mode of preparing hominy, was by pestling. A mortar was made by burning a bowl-shaped cavity in the even end of an upright block of wood. After thoroughly clearing it of the charcoal, the corn could be put in, hot water teemed upon it, and subjected to a severe pestling by a club of sufficient length and thickness, in the larger end of which was inserted an iron wedge banded to keep it there. The hot water would soften the corn and loosen the hull, and the pestle would crush it.

Another preparation of corn diet, called "samp," was made by cracking the kernels in a tan-bark mill, then boiling it like rice.

HISTORY OF MAHASKA COUNTY.

BY CAPT. W. A. HUNTER, OF OSKALOOSA HERALD.

[Continued from page 185.]

Every county constitutes an integral portion of the State, so that what interests the people in a part, interests them in the success and prosperity of the whole. If the State of Iowa is one of the best in the Union, and we believe it to be, and Mahaska County is one of the very best counties in the State, it follows as a deduction, that it must be a good county in every aspect of the case. We have frequently, in conversation, said, that so far as our observation extended, we regarded the tier of counties from east to west, in which Mahaska is located, as the best in the State, all things considered; and observation and study have satisfied us that Mahaska is, all things taken into the account, the best county in this tier. The reader may be ready to conclude, after what we have said, that it is our opinion, that we are living in as good, if not the

best county, in the United States. If such is the conclusion, we have no issue to take with it; because it is our deliberate opinion, founded on facts, that such is the case. In point of soil, productiveness, timber, stone, stone-coal, water and everything else that is calculated to make up a good and great county, it cannot be surpassed. There can be no better evidence of this, than the fact of its growth in population and wealth. Let the reader bear in mind that twenty-five years ago, the county was unorganized, and that there was not a foot of the land in all her broad domain that was owned by any individual—in short, that up to the year 1843, it was the home of wild men and wild beasts, not a single foot of the soil ever having been cultivated by the hand of civilization. How is it now? Thousands of her broad and fertile acres are under the hand of the agriculturalist, yielding their millions of bushels of grain, growing their thousands of horses, cattle, sheep, hogs, &c., erecting their comfortable houses, barns, out-houses and other conveniences. By industry the farmer, merchant, mechanic and laborer are growing rich in purse, and vigorous in body and mind. If the farmer from many of the sterile knobs of many of the states east of us, could be convinced of the great advantage they would derive by selling out their knobby, rocky, gravelly, clay farms and come to this county and purchase some of our rich lands, they would forever after be grateful to the friend who induced them to do so. We speak advisedly on this point, having seen and experienced enough to fully satisfy *us*, that Mahaska County is the best spot of earth *we* ever saw; and this is especially true of persons engaged in agricultural pursuits. When we use this broad term, we wish to be understood. Taking spring and fall, and summer and winter, climate, soil, advantages, conveniences, population, &c., into the account, we regard the remark, “is the best spot of earth we ever saw,” as true to the letter. We are not ignorant of the fact, that there is a class of persons who never can be suited with any situation in life, however favorable. They are constitutional grumblers and fault finders, never looking upon the bright side of anything, but always seeing something to object to and talk against. This

class of persons may, should they chance to come this way, and unfortunately some of them do, see something to condemn. To such the weather is too cold or too hot, there is too much snow or not snow enough, too much or too little rain, too much or not enough wind, the springs are too late or the falls too early, a certain kind of grain will not grow, it is not good for peaches and other fruits, and innumerable objections of this kind; but to persons whose heads are well balanced and whose minds are clear, these objections amount to nothing. There is no country in the world to which some objections could not be filed; but we are honestly of the opinion, that as few reasonable objections can be found to this county, as to any other spot of earth. We have now been a resident of it over three years, and each succeeding month adds new charms to it for us. We lived about fifteen years of our life in north-western Ohio, where, during some of these years, every other person, or even more than this, shook with the ague for one-half or more of the year. We presume it is not so there now. Ague in this county, and especially off the streams, is of very rare occurrence. We are told by old residents of this city, that a case was never known to generate in the city, or in any other part of the county, except in the vicinity of the streams, and not there every year, as is the case in miasmatic countries. The truth is, this is a very healthy country—none of the appearance of ague or miasmatic diseases appearing upon the countenances of the people. This, alone, is an item well worth considering, in seeking a location for life. What is the world without health? If we possessed the whole world and had not health to enjoy it, it would only be a burden on our hands. Here we can possess both, and what is infinitely *better*, can enjoy both. Having gone through a long practical experience of ague, chills, fever, and kindred diseases, we *know* how to appreciate a country and locality where they do not exist—and such we find, in our experience, Mahaska County to be. In fact, it cannot be otherwise, from the high, rolling and airy position it occupies. Health is depicted upon every thing we see, both

animate and inanimate. Trees, grass, flowers and vegetables all bear unmistakable marks of health and prosperity. Nothing can be more beautiful than to travel over our broad prairies in the spring of the year, carpeted with green and rapidly growing grass, and studded all over with beautiful prairie flowers of every hue and form. It is a truly splendid sight, and one well calculated, in the very nature of things, to beget an inspiration in the bosom of any one whose heart is susceptible of being touched by the beauties of nature. We are charmed with this scenery, and often think to ourselves, while passing over our fertile prairies, how very foolish people are to remain among the rocks, sands, stumps and trees of other states, while such scenery, prosperity, health and soil are inviting them to this region. The only reason why it is so, is because the people of whom we speak have no realization of the true state of things here, or of the great contrast between the two sections. If such would visit Mahaska County at this season of the year and see for themselves, they would not hesitate to make this their future home.

As we have before stated, we do not attempt any system in the order in which we speak of the different matters we treat of; and the reason is, because we are not attempting a chronological statement of facts merely, but a representation of such facts as will interest our own people, and edify those at a distance. All we say we design to be strictly truthful and reliable; going upon the maxim, that "truth is mighty and will prevail."

We chanced to fall into the company of Mr. Dunlap, of the enterprising and responsible firm of Fish & Dunlap, of our neighboring city of Eddyville, some weeks ago, when we learned from him some very interesting facts in relation to the early settlement of Mahaska County, and the then young and small town of Oskaloosa. He was one of the pioneers, and has a fund of incidents and knowledge pertaining to the early settlement of the county, that would be highly amusing and interesting. Among other matters, he spoke of his early acquaintance with John White, the President of the First Na-

tional Bank of our city, and the wealthiest man in the county. John is a real jovial "old fellow," who is always ready to give and take a joke. Mr. Dunlap described Mr. White's appearance the first time he ever saw him, and it is so amusing, all things considered, that we cannot refrain from giving it to the readers of the *Herald*. He said he was dressed in a full suit of butter-nut linsey, with a "wamus" fringed about the tail, a slouched hat, and coarse brogans without stockings. He came to the house of Mr. W. D. Canfield, where Mr. Dunlap was boarding, for the purpose of purchasing a calf. His appearance was both odd and peculiar, and he was as lithe as a cricket. He was *not* then President of a Bank, nor was he reputed very wealthy; but he was an honest, industrious man, and had troops of friends. Those were the times when all in the country were upon a pecuniary equality, when no one was much richer than his neighbor, and when the utmost good feeling universally prevailed. It would look rather singular to see John White attired in such a costume now. The people would stare at him with wonder and amazement. Why? Simply because he has become wealthy. Such is the power and influence of worldly wealth, that it changes the entire aspect of things. While John feels it convenient to have wealth enough to "keep the wolf from the door," as the old adage runs, yet we doubt very much, whether he enjoys life any more than he did in the days of his butter-nut hunting-shirt and brogan shoes. Then his labor was hard and his rest sweet; but perhaps it is not so now. His labor is equally as hard, while his rest is really *unrest*. He lays down upon his couch after a hard day's toil, to be disturbed in his repose with thoughts of how to manage this farm, how to secure that doubtful debt, how to keep up the good credit of his bank, and numberless perplexities of this kind, incident to the life and business of a man of his wealth. He is, however, deserving of much credit for the progress he has made. He told us himself, that when he first came to this country, he drove a breaking team at a small compensation per month—amount not remembered—in order to support his family; and he prides himself in being called "Cooper John," to distinguish

him from another person of the same name; having followed the coopering business for a living. From this he has gradually worked his way up until, as we have already said, he is now the wealthiest man in the county. It must be that he looks back over his life with great satisfaction, realizing the fact, that "time, patience and perseverance accomplish all things." In addition to all of his other gettings, he has got a full knowledge of the "Mystic art," and is a beloved brother, a pleasant companion, and a magnanimous Sir Knight. He is of pure Mahaska County growth, and is indebted to her soil for all of this world that he now enjoys. There is one thing he yet lacks—the most important of all others. With this principle in his heart, he would be a man who would accomplish much more good in the world than he now can.

Mr. Dunlap gave a number of other interesting incidents of that early day, and among others he spoke of the killing of a bear, near where Mr. Marks now lives, by a company of Oskaloosa boys, prominent among whom was M. T. Williams, Esq., of whom we have frequently spoken during the progress of this history. He says they had a jolly time of it, and finally brought Bruin to terms by a repeated use of the rifle. This was quite an epoch in the history of this region, and was, perhaps, the first and only animal of the kind ever killed in the vicinity by white men; as such animals prefer a timbered country.

According to the first records of the county, there were, in the year 1846, the names of one hundred and fifty jurors sent up to the county seat, from which to order the panels for the year. To show something of the increase of population, we are informed that there were seventy-five names sent up from Oskaloosa township, alone, in the year 1867—twenty-one years after the date first mentioned. According to this, this township now has more than half the population of the entire county in 1846. We find a record of this kind, which Mr. Williams informs us was considered a "big thing" for those times. "Ordered, that M. T. Williams be authorized to contract for the making of three tables and a desk; also, twelve

seats for the use of the court room, who is to contract for the above named articles on the best possible terms; also, seats for the upper rooms." It is an old and true saying, that "a child must crawl before it can walk," and this contract was upon this principle. The county had not the pecuniary ability to drive on in expenses as now, nor, in fact, had the people the disposition. What they wanted was what would answer the purpose, and supply the actual demand. Superfluities and luxuries were entirely out of the question, as being beyond the reach of the people of a new country. From such a commencement as this, the county has grown into great wealth, and is now amply able to bear her full share of the burden.

THE INDIAN TRIBES OF THE WEST.

Their Language, Religion and Traditions.

BY DR. ISAAC GALLAND.

[Copy-right secured.]

(Continued from page 208.)

ODJIBWA, OR CHIPPEWA TRADITION.

Mr. Schoolcraft says: "This tribe has a general tradition of a deluge, in which the earth was covered with water, reaching above the highest hills or mountains, but not above a tree which grew on the latter, by climbing which a man was saved. This man was the demi-god of their fictions, who is called Mana-bozho, by whose means the waters were stayed and the earth re-created. He employed for this purpose various animals who were sent to dive down for some of the primordial earth, of which a little was at length brought up by the beaver, and this formed the germ or nucleus of the new or rather rescued planet."

The Mona-bozho of the Chippewas is the Wis-uk-a of the Ozauks and other kindred tribes, who instead of climbing a tree is said to have made a vessel or boat which they call O-pes-quee, constructed of the air, and which floated upon

Copyright of *Annals of Iowa* is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.